

Actions on the Objective Hell! You Have To Go

By Capt. Joe Cleary

Marine units gain their reputations through their actions on an objective. Sometimes that means we need to get there fast, so we can surprise the bad guys or deliver a desperately needed part for a broken vehicle. When tasked with delivering Marines or supplies, Marine drivers can be counted on to move with a sense of urgency. But driving fast on dirt roads doesn't always get you to the broken truck or the hot landing zone. Here are a few examples:

"Comm-O! Why Is My Comm Still Down?"

If you want to see your CO stress out in the field, look at him when the communication lines go down. When you see his eyes bulge and the vein in his forehead swell, it means the comm will be down for a while.

When this happens, the closest communicator is guaranteed an earful. Most communicators don't take it personally, since the problem most likely is a non-communicator who isn't following instructions while working the equipment. In the following situation, it wasn't a piece of communication equipment, but a HMMWV.

With an urgent task to get the comm back on line, three Marines jumped into a HMMWV and raced across a field toward a communication "retrans" site. The driver, seeing a bump in the road, let off the gas—too little, too late. Beneath the HMMWV was a gaping tank ditch, and the Marines didn't stand a chance of flying over it like the stunt men in the movies. The HMMWV hit the ditch at 35 mph with crushing force, flipping over onto its roof. The good news was that all three Marines were wearing their flak jackets, helmets, and seatbelts.

The Marine riding in the front passenger seat suffered cuts and bruises to his eyes and face. He ended up in the hospital for eight days and was out of work for three weeks. The driver and rear passenger walked

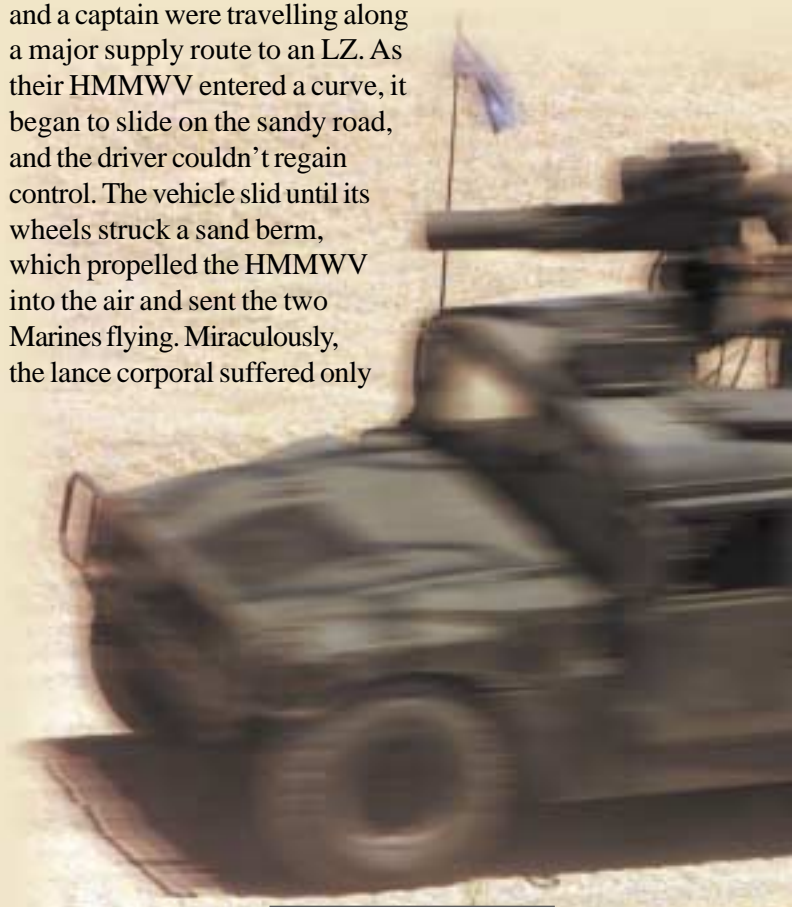
away with cuts to their legs, while the HMMWV was totaled.

The driver had exceeded the speed limit for the training area, and did so over unfamiliar terrain. His sense of urgency can be applauded, but his inattention got the best of him.

When communication lines stay down, we become extremely vulnerable since we can't call for a medevac or fire support when we need it. Maybe that explains why COs stress.

How Soon Do You Need To Get There, Sir?

During a desert training exercise, a lance corporal and a captain were travelling along a major supply route to an LZ. As their HMMWV entered a curve, it began to slide on the sandy road, and the driver couldn't regain control. The vehicle slid until its wheels struck a sand berm, which propelled the HMMWV into the air and sent the two Marines flying. Miraculously, the lance corporal suffered only



Ground Warrior

ective, Get There First!

several cuts to his head. The captain was not so fortunate; he broke his back.

The driver was driving 45 mph when the speed limit was 30. Neither Marine was wearing his seatbelt or helmet, despite a requirement to do so.

Some Marines Just Don't Listen

When Marines train aboard their base, speed-limit signs are usually posted to remind them of the safe driving speed for the existing road or terrain. But such warning signs are not always present in foreign countries and in some areas we operate. These instances test our leadership skills. As leaders, we brief our Marines on what we expect, recon the terrain, enforce orders and discipline. The time comes when we have to send Marines to the field, and trust them to make the right decisions. A company's leaders did all these things; unfortunately, not every Marine listened.

The company was operating in a mountainous desert when a 5-ton truck broke down. Needing a pair of good hands, a driver and a mechanic were told to link up with the truck and get the 5-ton running

and back on the road. Halfway to the breakdown site, they entered a curve on a dirt road and began to fishtail. The HMMWV's momentum was uncontrollable, and it rolled several times, catapulting both Marines out of the vehicle. Both were taken by medevac to a local hospital. The driver, a corporal, was treated for a concussion. He stayed in the hospital three days and was out of work for 16. The mechanic, a PFC, had severe bruises to his back and legs. He spent two days in the hospital and 15 days from work. The HMMWV had \$2,000 in damage.

Driving off-road takes a different set of skills and mindset because it's often unpredictable with steep, uneven, and soft terrain.

Again, both Marines were not wearing seatbelts. Just before the vehicle flipped, the driver and passenger estimated they were driving 40 mph on unfamiliar and rugged terrain.

At the start of this operation, company leaders had gathered all the drivers and told them not to go faster than 20 mph, and to drive more slowly around turns. They also talked about the rough terrain that the drivers should expect to see.

The unit leaders did the right things. The Marines, however, failed to step up to the plate and show they had self-discipline and a sense of responsibility.



Hot Chow, It's Urgent!

"Devil Dogs! Put away your MREs. You're getting hot chow this morning," a company gunny yells. It's not often you hear something so sweet coming from the gunny, especially when you're in the middle of a desert, and it's freezing. "Wait a minute. Hot chow is not coming. Get out your MREs," the gunny then says. Does this sound familiar? If so, this story explains what might have happened to your hot chow.

After delivering hot morning chow to one rifle company, a driver and a messman had one more unit on their schedule before calling it quits. They already were late and knew that delivering cold chow to a bunch of grunts wasn't a good idea. The road leading to the unit was steep, had some sharp turns, and was several miles away. While traveling at 40 mph, the driver entered a steep turn where the sun blinded him, and he lost control of his HMMWV. The vehicle fishtailed toward the edge of the road and rolled over, sending chow everywhere.

The driver dislocated his hip, was hospitalized for 16 days, and lost 22 more workdays. The messman broke his foot, fractured both sides of his pelvis, and cut his head, which required eight stitches. He was hospitalized five days and was out of work for 37 days. The HMMWV had \$3,314 in damage. Both were wearing seatbelts. The passenger was wearing his helmet and flak jacket, but the driver was not. The speed limit in the training area was 30 mph not 40.

In the desert, a driver might get away with 40 or 50 mph on a straightaway. But what happens when the terrain changes unexpectedly or a tire blows?

When a HMMWV Ride Becomes a Medevac

At the end of a company's gunnery exercise, a Marine and his assistant driver were tasked with picking up two road guards. The trip back to the range, where the rest of company was, got cut short when the driver made a sharp turn and lost control of his HMMWV. It rolled, ejecting the driver and front passenger. The two road guards, who were riding in back, also got tossed. The Marines were wearing their flak jackets and helmets, but they were not wearing their seatbelts. Three of the Marines had to be flown to a hospital for treatment.

Routine tasks like picking up Marines to return them to the company area shouldn't have to end with an airborne medevac. Speeding on dirt roads continues to be the primary cause of most HMMWV mishaps, including rollovers. The HMMWV can travel 40 to 50 mph on asphalt roads, under ideal conditions, and it's a proven off-road vehicle, but like any other car or truck it too has limits. Driving off-road takes a different set of skills and mindset because it's often unpredictable with steep, uneven, and soft terrain. Washouts can be common, and vegetation can hide many dangers. Next time you find yourself driving off-road, remember what your SNCO said about the speed limit and terrain, and follow the SOP. Drop your speed a notch, and get to your objective in fighting shape. Gunny will be pleased. 🍌

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